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Who are Branhamites and How Do Their Doctrines Stand in Contradiction to the Bible?

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William Branham, a significant figure in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, is known for his teachings and claimed prophetic gifts. His followers, known as Branhamites or Message Believers, believe he was the final prophet to the Church, fulfilling the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 of Elijah coming before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. However, an in-depth examination of his doctrines reveals several points of divergence from orthodox biblical teachings. This article examines these doctrines in light of Scripture, aiming to promote biblical truth and discernment.

Theology of Branham

Branham taught that he was the "seventh angel" mentioned in the Book of Revelation, asserting that his teachings were divine revelations that superseded the Bible. This is a direct contradiction to the Bible's presentation of itself as the complete and final revelation of God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 emphasizes that "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*" Additionally, Revelation 22:18-19 warns against adding to or taking away from the words of the prophecy, underscoring the sufficiency and finality of Scripture.

Trinitarian Doctrine

Branham rejected the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity, teaching a form of Modalism, which sees the three persons of the Godhead as successive manifestations of the same divine being. However, the Bible clearly presents God as a Trinity, consisting of three distinct persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19 instructs believers to baptize "*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*" and 2 Corinthians 13:14 speaks of "*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.*" These verses illustrate the triune nature of God, contradicting Branham's teachings.

Christology

Branham's teachings on the nature of Christ, such as the belief that Jesus was not divine but rather the first-born son of God, deviate from mainstream Christian Christology. Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man from the moment of His incarnation. John 1:1, 14 states, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" Colossians 2:9 affirms, "*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.*" These verses clearly affirm the eternal divinity of Jesus Christ, opposing Branham's views.

Salvation

Branham taught that salvation depended on accepting his specific revelations and being baptized in his name, rather than through faith in Christ alone. This contradicts the Bible's teaching that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 clarifies, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*" Acts 4:12 also emphasizes, "*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*" These passages emphasize that salvation is through faith in Christ alone, not through any human intermediaries or additional revelations.

Cessationism

Branham rejected the idea that miraculous spiritual gifts had ceased, claiming an ongoing prophetic and miracle-working ministry. While there is debate within Christianity regarding the continuation of spiritual gifts, the Bible calls for discernment regarding prophetic claims. 1 John 4:1 advises, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*" Additionally, 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 suggests that prophecies and tongues will pass away, implying a need for caution and testing in claims of ongoing prophetic authority.

Prophetic Authority

Branham claimed direct divine revelations and prophecies that he believed superseded and interpreted the Bible. This contradicts the biblical view of Scripture as the final prophetic authority. 2 Peter 1:20-21 states, "*Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*" Hebrews 1:1-2 adds, "*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*" These verses emphasize the finality and completeness of biblical revelation, opposing Branham's claims of superior personal revelation.

Racism and Segregation

Branham espoused racist views and promoted racial segregation, which are incompatible with the biblical principles of human equality and unity in Christ. Galatians 3:28 proclaims, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Acts 17:26 also teaches that God "*made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.*" These passages affirm the equality and unity of all people in Christ, condemning any form of racism or segregation.

Legalism

Branham's teachings placed heavy emphasis on strict rules and regulations, such as dress codes and lifestyle restrictions, which some see as a form of legalism. The Bible, however, teaches that salvation and sanctification are by grace, not by adhering to legalistic rules. Galatians 5:1 declares, "*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*" Colossians 2:20-23 warns against submitting to regulations that appear wise but have no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. These verses caution against the legalism found in Branham's teachings.

Perfectionism

Branham taught that his followers could achieve sinless perfection in this life. This contradicts the biblical view of ongoing human sinfulness. 1 John 1:8 warns, "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" Philippians 3:12 acknowledges the ongoing struggle with sin: "*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*" These passages affirm that believers will continue to struggle with sin, opposing the perfectionism in Branham's teachings.

Denialism

Branham denied or downplayed certain historical and scientific facts, such as the age of the earth. While the Bible's inerrancy pertains to its teachings on faith and morals, not necessarily to scientific or historical claims, it does call for truthfulness and integrity. Psalm 19:1 states, "*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*" Romans 1:20 adds, "*For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.*" These verses suggest that God's creation speaks to His glory and power, encouraging a truthful understanding of the world.

Authoritarian Leadership

Branham insisted on absolute obedience to his personal teachings and leadership. The Bible, however, warns against authoritarian leadership and promotes servant leadership. 1 Peter 5:3 advises leaders to be "*not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*" Jesus Himself taught in Mark 10:42-45 that leadership among His followers should be based on service and humility, not on exercising authority over others. These passages promote a model of leadership based on service, opposing the authoritarianism found in Branham's teachings.

Cultism

The Branham Movement has been accused of exhibiting cult-like tendencies, such as isolationism and the rejection of outside criticism. The Bible encourages fellowship and accountability within the broader body of Christ. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges believers to "*consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.*" 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 advises, "*But test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.*" These verses emphasize the importance of community and accountability, contrasting with the isolationism and rejection of criticism seen in the Branham Movement.

Other Controversial Doctrines

Branham's teachings also included several other controversial doctrines. He believed in the "serpent seed" doctrine, which claimed that Eve's sin involved sexual relations with the serpent, producing a lineage of people destined for damnation. This idea is not supported by the biblical account of the Fall, which describes sin entering the world through disobedience (Genesis 3:1-7; Romans 5:12). Branham also endorsed Annihilationism, the belief that the wicked will be completely destroyed rather than suffering eternal punishment, which contradicts the traditional Christian view of eternal hell (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:10). Additionally, he promoted the "Word of Faith" theology, asserting that believers can claim material blessings and healing through positive confessions, a doctrine that often misinterprets biblical promises (James 4:3)

Today, there is no single, unified Branhamite denomination, but there are various groups that continue to follow Branham's teachings to varying degrees. Some, like the "Branham Christ" group, go so far as to equate Branham with Christ, while others merely respect his teachings. Overall, Branham's teachings are considered heretical, containing a mix of bad theology, twisted Scripture, and personal pride. Christians are advised to steer clear of Branhamism.

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